Hurricane claims 50 lives across Caribbean

KINGSTON: Melissa, one of the strongest storms on record to make landfall in the Caribbean, began to dissipate on Friday after sowing devastation across much of Jamaica, cutting off communities in Cuba, drenching Haiti and leaving fifty people dead.

Melissa was the most powerful storm ever to directly hit Jamaica, and the first major hurricane to do so since 1988. Forecaster AccuWeather estimated $48 billion to $52 billion in damage and economic loss across the western Caribbean.

Melissa pounded southwestern Jamaica on Tuesday as a powerful Category 5 hurricane, well above minimum wind speeds for the strongest hurricane classification, and devastated many areas already battered by last year's Hurricane Beryl.

Jamaica's information minister confirmed at least 19 deaths on Friday, but said there were indications more bodies would be recovered. Some 462,000 people remain without power and emergency food distributions have started, she said.

In Haiti, which was not directly hit but suffered days of torrential rains from the slow-moving storm, authorities reported at least 31 deaths and 20 more missing.

At least 23 people, including 10 children, died in Haiti's southern town of Petit-Goave when a river burst its banks. Roads, houses and farmland were also damaged by the rains.

"It is a sad moment for the country," the head of Haiti's transitional presidential council said. "In addition to the deaths and missing people, there is a lot of material damage: houses have been destroyed, fields flooded, livestock lost and roads cut off."

Authorities also warned of the risk of cholera, which re-emerged in Haiti in 2022 and spreads through contaminated water.

In Cuba, which Melissa struck as a Category 3 hurricane, no deaths were reported as of Friday, though it caused extensive damage to homes, roads and crops. Hundreds of thousands were evacuated from eastern Cuba and around the island's second-biggest city, Santiago de Cuba.—Reuters

EMERGENCY personnel evacuate a woman from her home in Rio Cauto, Cuba, after a river flooded in the wake of Hurricane Melissa.—Reuters

'Hundreds dead' as violence rocks Tanzania after polls

NAIROBI: Around 700 people have been killed in three days of election protests in Tanzania, the main opposition party said on Friday, with protesters still on the streets in the midst of an internet blackout.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan had sought to cement her position and silence critics in her party with an emphatic win in Wednesday's election, in which her main challengers were either jailed or barred from standing.

But the vote descended into chaos as crowds took to the streets of Dar es Salaam and other cities, tearing down her posters and attacking police and polling stations, leading to an internet shutdown and curfew.

With foreign journalists largely banned from covering the election and a communications blackout entering its third day, information from the ground has been scarce.

The main opposition party, Chadema, said clashes continued between protesters and security forces in the commercial hub on Friday.

"As we speak, the figure for deaths in Dar (es Salaam) is around 350, and for Mwanza it is 200-plus. Added to figures from other places around the country, the overall figure is around 700," Chadema spokesman John Kitoka said.

"The death toll could be much higher," he warned, saying killings could be happening during the nighttime curfew.

A security source said they were hearing reports of more than 500 dead, "maybe 700-800 in the whole country".—AFP

World's most expensive coffee goes on sale in Dubai for $1,000 a cup

DUBAI: Selling for nearly $1,000 a cup, a cafe in Dubai is offering the world's most expensive coffee, brewed from Panamanian beans sold at a premium price.

The wealthy emirate is known for its extravagant ventures, including an enormous mall with an indoor ski area, the world's tallest building, and an artificial island dotted with five-star hotels.

"We felt Dubai was the perfect place for our investment," said Serkan Sagsoz, co-founder of the Julith cafe with the pricey offering.

Located in an industrial neighbourhood that has become a hotspot for coffee lovers, Julith plans to serve "around 400 cups" of the precious beverage starting on Saturday, Sagsoz said.

For a price tag of 3,600 dirhams (around $980), the brew offers an experience of floral and fruity flavours reminiscent of tea.

"There are white floral notes like jasmine, citrus flavours like orange and bergamot, and a hint of apricot and peach," said Sagsoz, who previously ran a cafe in his native Turkey.

"It's like honey, delicate and sweet," he said.

Dubai notched a Guinness World Record for the world's most expensive cup of coffee last month, when Roasters offered one for 2,500 dirhams.

The new record staggered some people, though residents also said it was par for the course for the desert city with a luxury lifestyle.

"It's very shocking, but at the same time, it's Dubai," said Ines, who did not give her last name.

"For wealthy people, it's just another experience they can boast about," added another resident, Maeva.—AFP

Israeli military official resigns after leaked abuse video stirs furore

JERUSALEM: The Israeli military's chief legal officer resigned on Friday over a criminal inquiry into the leaking of a video that showed soldiers abusing a Palestinian detainee arrested during the Gaza conflict.

Advocate General Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi said that she was stepping down because she had approved the video's leak in August last year.

The abuse investigation led to criminal charges against five soldiers and stirred an uproar. The inquiry drew condemnation from right-wing politicians and prompted protesters to storm two military compounds after investigators sought troops for questioning in the case.

A week after the break-in at the bases, a security camera video showing the moments of the alleged abuse was leaked to an Israeli television channel.

It showed soldiers taking a prisoner aside and crowding around while holding a dog and blocking visibility of their actions with their riot gear.

On Wednesday, Defence Minister Israel Katz said that there has been an ongoing criminal inquiry into the video leak and that Tomer-Yerushalmi was on forced leave.

Tomer-Yerushalmi defended her action as an attempt to fend off propaganda against the military's legal department entrusted with upholding the rule of law, and which she said had been subjected to smears throughout the war.

`Violence must be probed'

The footage came from Sde Teiman detention camp, where some Hamas fighters are held.

Rights groups have reported grave abuses of Palestinians in Israeli detention since Oct 2023. Israel's military is investigating dozens of cases, but says abuse is not systematic.

Tomer-Yerushalmi called Sde Teiman detainees "terrorists of the worst kind", in her resignation letter, but added that this did not take away from the obligation to investigate suspected abuse.

"To my regret, this basic understanding — that there are acts to which even the most vile of detainees must not be subjected — is no longer convincing to all," she said.

Some politicians were swift to seize on Tomer-Yerushalmi's resignation. Katz said that anyone who fabricates "blood libels against Israeli soldiers was unworthy of donning IDF uniform".

Police Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir welcomed the resignation and called for an inquiry into more legal authorities.

He also posted a video of himself standing over Palestinian prisoners who were lying bound on the floor in an Israeli jail, saying that they were Oct 7 attackers who should receive the death penalty.

Around 1,700 Gaza detainees were freed this month as part of the ceasefire in exchange for 20 Israeli prisoners.—Reuters

Fear for a weakened monarchy drove Charles to move against Andrew

LONDON: King Charles's ruthless move to banish his younger brother from public life was born of a desire to insulate a weakened monarchy before he passes on the crown, analysts said after Charles stripped Andrew of his title of prince on Thursday.

But it remains to be seen whether the move would can restore the institution's battered image, said one of the analysts.

The king evicted Andrew from his mansion near Windsor Castle and said he and the queen were thinking of survivors of abuse, to draw a line under a scandal around his ties to Jeffrey Epstein that has buffeted the royals for years.

It marked one of the most dramatic moves against a member of the royal family in modern British history, by a king who is still undergoing regular cancer treatment and whose priority is to bolster support for the monarchy before his eldest son Prince William inherits the throne.

But some commentators said the move should have come much earlier.

With Queen Camilla and the king's sister-in-law Sophie both long-term campaigners against sexual violence, royal author Robert Hardman said Andrew's ties to the US sex offender were increasingly putting the royal family in "Team Epstein", which Charles could not live with.

"He wants to put as much distance between his brother and the monarchy as he can," Hardman, the author of *Charles III: The Inside Story*, said.

The royals have been trying to cast aside Andrew, the younger brother of Charles and second son of the late Queen Elizabeth, for years, for fear that he would tar the family with the same air of entitlement and bad behaviour that has long lingered around him.

Andrew had once been regarded as a dashing naval officer who returned from the Falklands War with Argentina in 1982 to greet his mother with a red rose clamped between his teeth.

But in the following decades the supposed favourite son of the queen became the focal point for much mockery as the British press focused on his personal life, dubbing him "Randy Andy" and "Air Miles Andy" for his jet-set lifestyle.

That ridicule turned to revulsion when Andrew was revealed to have stayed in contact with Epstein after he was jailed for sex offences in 2008, and when he gave a disastrous interview in which he failed to show any sympathy for victims of abuse.

No regret

Andrew told the BBC's Newsnight interview he did not regret his friendship with the US financier because it had had some "seriously beneficial outcomes".

He quit all royal duties in the wake of the interview and was stripped of his military links and royal patronages in 2022.

That year he also settled a lawsuit brought by Virginia Giuffre which accused him of sexually abusing her when she was a teenager after being introduced by Epstein.

Andrew had denied ever meeting Giuffre, who died by suicide in April. Her account returned to prominence with the publication of her memoir this month.

Royal experts said Charles' actions reflected the threat to the institution, after a move earlier this month to stop Andrew from using his Duke of York title was deemed to be inadequate.

In recent weeks Andrew had overshadowed two efforts by Charles to shape cultural and public life - his historic praying with the pope in the Vatican and the unveiling of a memorial to LGBT military veterans who had previously been banned.

"I think that the fact that the royal family decided to actually go against him is quite a big thing," said recruitment worker Anna Hunter, 29, in London.—Reuters

A REPORTER works outside Buckingham Palace, the day after King Charles stripped his younger brother Andrew of his title of prince and forced him out of his Windsor home.—Reuters

Ambassador to Austria ignores Taliban warning to quit position

VIENNA: The Taliban government asked her to leave. But for more than four years, Manizha Bakhtari has defied the leadership in Kabul and remains accredited by Vienna as Afghanistan's ambassador to Austria.

Since returning to power in Aug 2021, the Taliban authorities have sought to replace Bakhtari with one of their own diplomats, because she was appointed by the former government.

When Bakhtari, like many of her colleagues, received a letter from Taliban officials relieving her of her diplomatic duties, she simply ignored it.

"That was just a piece of paper for me," she said in an interview at the embassy's downsized premises, after relocating from central Vienna with the help of the Afghan diaspora.

"I don't recognise the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate government, and they don't have recognition here in Austria," said 53-year-old Bakhtari.

Vienna has so far refused to accredit Taliban-appointed diplomats, although the Austrian government has held direct talks with Taliban authorities over deportations this year.

"Ms Bakhtari is still accredited as Afghanistan's ambassador and permanent representative to international organisations in Austria," a spokesperson for Austria's foreign ministry said on Thursday.

Her embassy also offers limited consular services such as extending passports.

As the last Afghan woman accredited as an ambassador anywhere in the world, she was featured in an Austrian documentary that is currently showing in cinemas.

But the film has also painted a target on her back, with hate messages, including even death threats, frequently flooding her social media, said Bakhtari.

"They call me a `dirty, ugly woman' who `cherishes Western values', but I don't care," she said.

"They've adopted draconian policies, especially towards women but also men, freedom of speech and the media," Bakhtari said.—AFP

Christians face 'existential threat' in Nigeria, Trump says

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said on Friday that Christianity faces a threat in Nigeria and he was adding the West African nation to a US State Department watch list.

"Christianity is facing an existential threat in Nigeria. Thousands of Christians are being killed. Radical Islamists are responsible for this mass slaughter," Trump wrote in a post on *Truth Social*.

He said he was putting Nigeria, Africa's top oil producer and most populous country, on a "Countries of Particular Concern" list of nations the US finds have engaged in religious freedom violations.

The list includes Pakistan, China, Russia, Myanmar and North Korea.

Trump said he was asking Representatives Riley Moore and Tom Cole, as well as the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee, to look into the matter and report back to him.—Reuters

FBI claims foiling attack plot in Michigan

WASHINGTON: FBI Director Kash Patel said on Friday that officials had stopped a potential attack in Michigan, arresting multiple people, without providing further details.

This morning, the FBI thwarted a potential terrorist attack and arrested multiple subjects in Michigan who were allegedly plotting a violent attack over Halloween weekend, Patel said in a post on X on Friday.

A Justice Department official said the plot had been expected to take place over Halloween weekend and was tied to international terrorism. Police in Dearborn said that the FBI had conducted an operation in that city on Friday.—Reuters

After 'conditional truce', all eyes on Kabul's next steps

Continued from Page 1

terrorist entities, including Fitna al-Khawarij (TTP) and Fitna al-Hindustan (Balochistan Liberation Army)," Mr Andarabi said.

While the Foreign Office emphasised diplomacy, the security official was explicit about Islamabad's conditional approach.

"Pakistan reaffirms its commitment to peace and stability on its western border but equally emphasises that this ceasefire is not open-ended and not unconditional," the official emphasised.

He added that Pakistan expects "credible evidence of action, including dismantling of militant hideouts, disruption of logistical channels, arrests or prosecutions of leadership and transparent reporting through the agreed monitoring and verification mechanism".

"If Afghanistan fails to deliver verifiable proof of agreed steps, or if militants continue to launch attacks from Afghan soil, Pakistan will deem the ceasefire violated and reserves all options to safeguard its sovereignty and citizens," he warned.

FO 'fully engaged'

The Pakistani delegation in Istanbul was dominated by military and intelligence officials, though the Foreign Office spokesman insisted it remained fully engaged.

"Istanbul talks took place with full engagement from the Foreign Office," Mr Andarabi said. "The deputy prime minister and foreign minister gave guidance on numerous occasions. The foreign secretary and our Afghanistan Division were also engaged. We need to dispel this impression that there is some sort of fragmentation in our government apparatus."

Mr Andarabi also clarified that "the border remains closed for trade for now. The opening of the border for Afghan transit trade would depend on the evaluation of the security situation, and clearly that evaluation still warrants closure of the border."

On the monitoring system, the security source said, "The monitoring and verification mechanism established under the mediators' auspices will serve as the impartial and essential instrument to determine compliance by Afghanistan."

Pakistan, however, remains sceptical about the Afghan Taliban's sincerity.

"Despite repeated assurances in the past (by Afghan Taliban), there has been a surge in terrorist attacks in Pakistan from Afghanistan," Mr Andarabi recalled.

The spokesman further disclosed that the Afghan Taliban had acknowledged the presence of TTP and BLA on Afghan soil, even if they offered excuses for inaction. "As far as the acknowledgement of their physical presence in Afghanistan is concerned, they agreed to it," he said.

Security officials echoed that scepticism, while noting that "the single litmus test of Taliban sincerity is that Afghanistan will not allow its territory to be used for attacks against Pakistan".

Multi-nation monitors

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Asif suggested that there might be the inclusion of multiple countries in the monitoring mechanism to ensure its long-term sustainability instead of a breakdown in 12 or 15 months.

He said giving a "free hand" to any border crossing of terrorists amounted to abetting them or conniving with them. "If they don't stop this or monitor this, it means they have connivance and their agreement is involved in terrorists coming and spilling blood in Pakistan," he said.

To a question on whether the Afghan Taliban accepted the presence and usage of their soil by the TTP to conduct attacks on Pakistan, Mr Asif: "They accept this privately."

He said the two were very entangled, and the entire TTP leadership was present in Kabul. "The sanctuaries in Kabul must have been provided by the Afghan Taliban. They (TTP) won't be living in hotels," he added.

Mr Asif asserted that Pakistan's main demand continued to be the "stopping of terrorism emanating from Afghan soil".

He added that "there is a ray of hope, but not because of Afghanistan and only so because of Qatar and Turkiye's influence" over Kabul.

"There have been some ceasefire violations from Afghanistan,: he said, stressing that "until terrorism stops, the ceasefire cannot be effective".